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Defense bill stalled on nerve gas, spies

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House and Senate negotiators agreed on major portions of the 1986 defense bill yesterday, but sources said there was still a lack of agreement over execution of military spies in peacetime and nerve gas production.

The House version of the defense bill allows execution of military personnel convicted of espionage during peacetime, but one House source said that had become a "sticking point" with Senate conferees.

Both houses called for resumption of the production of lethal nerve gas. But House negotiators were hoping for some version of their bill's language that would require NATO allies formally to request production and agree to deployment on their territory.

The Senate bill had no such conditions for resumed production of nerve gas, which was stopped in the United States in 1969. House negotiators are said to have offered as their last compromise wording that would stop production only if a NATO ally

formally objects and says it will not deploy.

The 39 conferees, who are working in nine subpanels, last night met as a group to identify areas where consensus was reached. Sources said the conference appears to have agreed to:

- Take the Senate figure of 50 MX missiles in existing silos but accept the House language making the number a permanent cap. The Pentagon had requested 100.

- Provide \$2.75 billion for the Strategic Defense Initiative, the space-based anti-missile defense research program, by splitting the difference between the \$2.5 billion approved by the House and the \$2.97 billion approved by the Senate. The Pentagon had requested \$3.7 billion.

- Approve an increase of \$100 million above President Reagan's request for \$624.5 million next year for the "Midgetman," the single-warhead missile designed as a successor to the MX. The Senate had voted for the administration level, while the House approved \$150 million more.

- Allow the anti-satellite weapons

program to conduct three tests against objects in space through 1986. The Senate had voted to permit unlimited tests as long as Mr. Reagan said he was trying to seek a U.S.-Soviet ban on such weapons, while the House approved a ban on the experiments unless the Soviets resumed testing.

The conferees had agreed to ask the Air Force to conduct a competition for future purchases of fighters, another source said. Northrop Corp. is trying to win a government contract for its F-20 fighter over the F-16 produced by General Dynamics.

The conference had problems with the issue of purchasing "Tacamo" aircraft for communicating with strategic missile submarines, sources also said.

There also was controversy over the Advanced Medium Air-to-Air Missile, to be produced by Hughes Aircraft Co. of Tuscon, which was in the Senate version but not the House version of the defense bill.

A Defense Department official has recommended the Pentagon delay building this newest dogfighting missile until uncertainties about the manufacturers' ability to build the weapon are resolved, according to news accounts of a report leaked to the media Wednesday.

The missile, to be supplied to the Navy and Air Force, is to replace the AIM-7 Sparrow as a primary dogfighting weapon.